

Practical Approaches to Education for Intercultural Understanding

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses how education for intercultural understanding is integrated into university classes. In section 2, we will see the purpose of intercultural understanding education, referring to the Common European Framework, UNESCO and the National Curriculum Standards of Japan. In section 3, two case studies will be discussed: one is a first-year seminar, the other is Practical Studies on Intercultural Understanding. As we will see, a learning technique called collaborative learning is employed in these two courses. Among the techniques of collaborative learning, the instructors made use of role-play and service-learning. We will discuss how active the learners turned out to be inside and outside of the classrooms as a result of this learning. Section 4 concludes this paper.

2. What is the purpose of education for intercultural understanding?

In language teaching, it is common that teachers attempt to nurture students' attitudes towards intercultural communication competence. Among other things, intercultural understanding plays a significant role in acquiring that competence. This section discusses the purpose of intercultural understanding education, considering those of the Common European Framework (henceforth, CEF), UNESCO and the National Curriculum Standards of Japan (henceforth, NCS).

2.1 CEF and UNESCO

The CEF makes remarks about language education, stating "[i]n an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education to promote the favorable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (Council of Europe (2001: 1))." According to Leo (2010), on the other hand, UNESCO recognizes that quality education covers intercultural understanding education. Furthermore, Leo (2010: 15) refers to the purpose of education for intercultural understanding as "to promote peace and social harmony, both within countries and broadly."

2.2 NCS

The Japanese NCS of English in high school provides the following objective concerning intercultural understanding:

To develop appropriate attitudes towards and basic abilities for engaging in proactive communication with people of diverse cultural backgrounds through the English language, while deepening understanding toward foreign countries and cultures.

It is interesting to point out that the NCS of the Japanese language of high school contains the

term "intercultural understanding." The standards (2018: 143-144) advocates viewpoints regarding globalization: to deepen abilities and understanding to aspects of Japanese traditions and cultures is to develop affection for Japan and the local communities, leading ones to develop the foundation of intercultural understanding. As will be discussed below, the first-year seminar contains those who are in a teacher education program of both the Japanese and English languages. In that sense, education for intercultural understanding is of great significance.

To sum up, education for intercultural understanding develops learners' sympathetic attitudes towards others with cultures different from their own. In an intercultural approach, then, learners can build a symbiotic relationship with others.

3. Case studies

3.1 Case one: First-Year Seminar (FYS)¹

3.1.1 Teaching strategy; collaborative learning and role-play

FYS is an introductory course offered to first-year students to help them get accustomed to the college environment and develop college skills. With regard to the learning methods these days, group learning or interactive learning has occupied considerable attention in higher education. The learning method has been recently called cooperative or collaborative learning. In this paper, we make use of collaborative learning. Barkley, Major and Cross (2014: 4) say that collaborative learning includes intentional learning activities for students, co-laboring and meaningful learning as students work together. As one of the techniques of collaborative learning, this course employed role-play, in which "students deliberately act out or assume characters or identities they would not normally assume to accomplish learning goals" (Barkley, Major and Cross (2014: 206)). Students in this class were required to make models of Japanese conversation for international students and the videos. See the following figures:



Figure 1

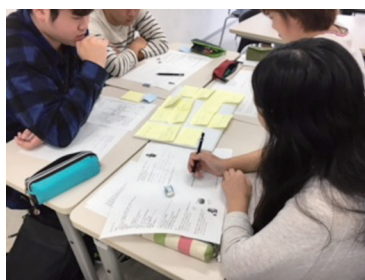


Figure 2



Figure 3

As shown in figures 1-3, the students collaborated with each other. In addition, they made videos, as illustrated below:



Figure 4

The students employed role-play to make Japanese conversation models and produce videos. Notice that both Japanese and English are used in this video.

3.1.2 Course description

Since the fall semester of 2017, K & S has set a theme of "intercultural understanding" in this course. Note, however, that the goal of the course is to make first-year students gain college skills along with an understanding of Hijiya University's mission statement and developing teacher-student and student-student relationships. Therefore, intercultural understanding plays not only a major role, but one of the supporting roles for students to acquire college skills.

It is also necessary that we build up a framework which establishes a students' learning routine and develops their own learning methods. Thus, K & S intend to build up a program where students enhance the Japanese and English language abilities as a basic skill for all the learnings and also nurture a great variety of abilities such as cognitive, judging and expressive abilities. What is more, the program assigns extracurricular activities to students in order for them to gain those abilities.

3.1.3 Course activities

The course covers the following:

- (1) a. Introduction and ice breaker questions
- b. Making conversation: situations and Japanese conversation
- c. Making conversation in English
- d. Youth language: expressions not contained in a dictionary²
- e. Introduction to video making
- f. Video making
- g. Appreciating works and comments

Students were assigned to make Japanese conversations for international students and to make videos by role-play with English subtitles and the grammatical explanations. Before the assignment, K & S gave the purposes of the course to students as follows: to improve students' Japanese and English language abilities: to enhance their overall communication ability: to solve problems in society: and to answer social needs.

The students produced model conversations for Japanese college and daily life, and then translated them into English. Besides, the students collected examples of youth language, translating them into English. Below is a model conversation for college life:³

- (2) A: What do you do after school?
B: Um.....I am free after school. So I want to work a part time job.
A: I see. What kind of job would you like?
B: I like talking with people.
A: It might be better to work at places like restaurants, cafes or convenience stores?
B: I see. By the way, What are you doing?

A: I work in the kitchen of a restaurant as a cook.
 B: That sounds good.
 A: My restaurant needs more people. So, if you like, can you work with me?
 B: Really? Please tell me more about it.
 A: You get paid 900 yen per hour. Furthermore, full compensation for travel expenses, and you get meals.
 You have to work from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. and at least 3 days a week.
 B: Sounds great!

While the students were having a great difficulty in producing model conversations and translating, it seems that they enjoyed making lists of youth language that are not contained in a dictionary. This is because the youth language is of their own daily language and are found in their text messages and conversations. What is more interesting is that they enjoyed translating their daily language into English. See the following examples:⁴

- (3) a. Ripu
 "reply"
 b. Bocchi
 "alone"
 c. Jiwaru
 "to grow on you"
 d. Wazu
 "was"
 e. Wanchan
 "one more chance"
 f. Insutabae
 "instagrammable"
 g. Moru
 "stuck"

It should be noticed here that the English glosses of (3c, d, g) have a lack of certain definitions. (3c) means "to make someone laugh after a certain amount of time"; (3d) "to have done something"; (3g) "to make things better than what it is". Why are the English glosses in (3) lacking definitions? When translating one language into another, one needs to have not only abilities of both languages, but also intercultural understanding competence. In order for learners to have the competence, it is necessary that instructors focus on education for intercultural understanding even in courses like first-year seminar.

3.1.4 Some remarks on the first-year seminar

We have seen so far that the students were given assignments in every lecture, trying to improve the abilities of the Japanese and English languages and their communication skills. A proper load of assignments is effective in helping students enhance their skills, such as communication and language.

However, instructors have to be cautious about how much work they give to students. It is important to point out that we, instructors, assign tasks that develop students' interest. See Diagram 1 below:

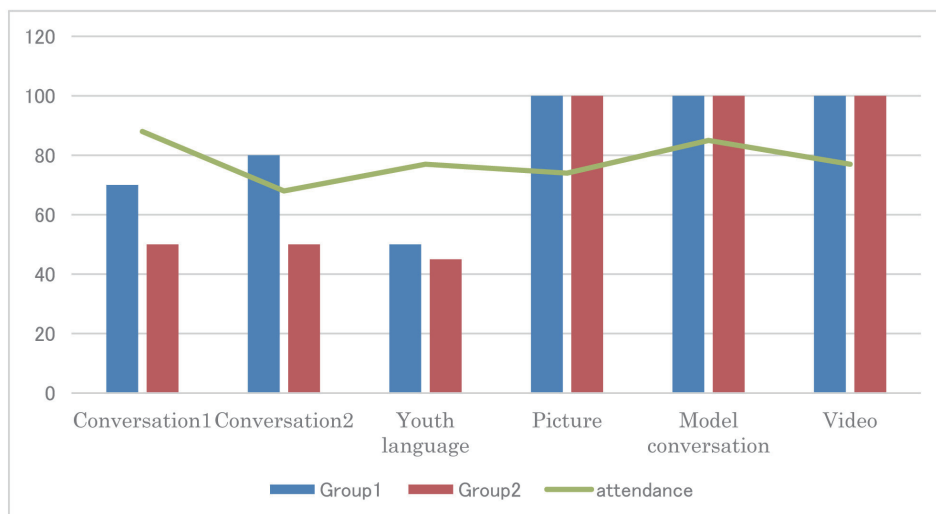


Diagram 1

Diagram 1 illustrates the ratios of the class attendance (line graph) and the assignment submission (bar graph). The students worked as groups in submitting pictures, model conversations and videos. As for the outcomes of this course, they were not actually shown to international students and the students did not receive any feedback. If the students had gained the feedback, that would have led them to more meaningful learning. K & S intend to expand the activities in the first-year seminar next year on the basis of the findings through the course this year.

3.2 Case two: Practical Studies on Intercultural Understanding

3.2.1 Teaching strategy: service-learning

As one of the course activities, the learners were involved with an elementary school in a local community, Hesaka Elementary School. The school has a direct tie with an Australian elementary school. In this course, the instructor (Sasaki) employed a teaching strategy called service-learning. Students engaged in community service and applied what they learned to the service. Thomsen (2014) shows that according to the Education Commission of the States, high-quality service-learning requires the following eight elements: meaningful service, international links to curriculum, reflection, diversity among participants, youth and parental engagement and decision-making, mutually beneficial partnerships, ongoing progress monitoring, and appropriate duration and intensity to meet community needs and outcomes. The Commission also illustrates "students engaged in high-quality service-learning learn to collaborate, think critically and problem solve" (Thomsen (2014: 2)). Billig (2006: 25) also shows that "participation in high-quality service-learning can result in improved attendance, increased test scores, greater problem-solving skills."

3.2.2 Course activities and student evaluations

Twenty two students registered this course and they were divided into groups of five or six. The learners in this course were required to translate school newsletters of Hesaka Elementary School into

English. Furthermore, they needed to analyze other students' works in advance and discussed them in the classroom. In order to do that, the instructor used Google Classroom as shown below:⁵

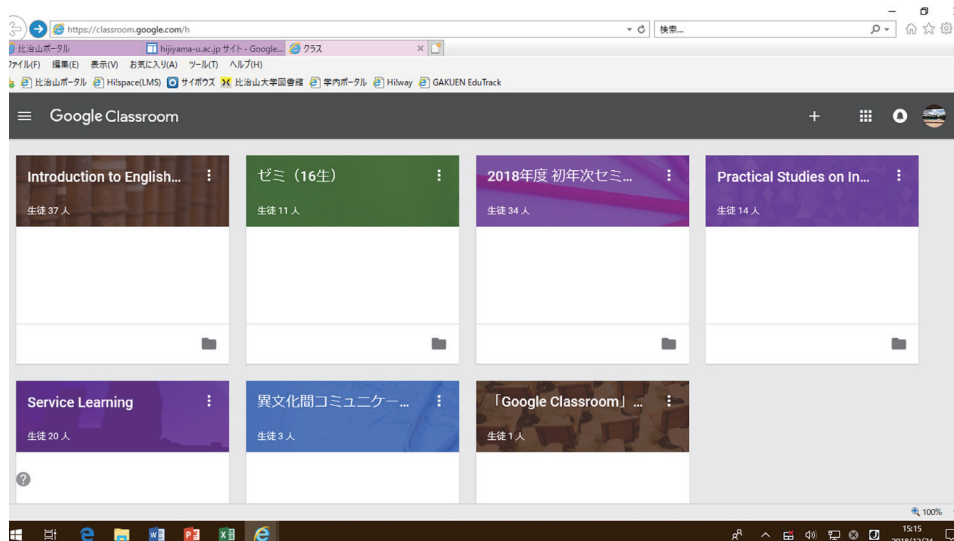


Figure 5

With Google classroom, the instructor can communicate with the students online and distribute assignments. The students can also put their assignments onto the website. What is important to note is that each student can look at other students' works, as shown in Figure 6:

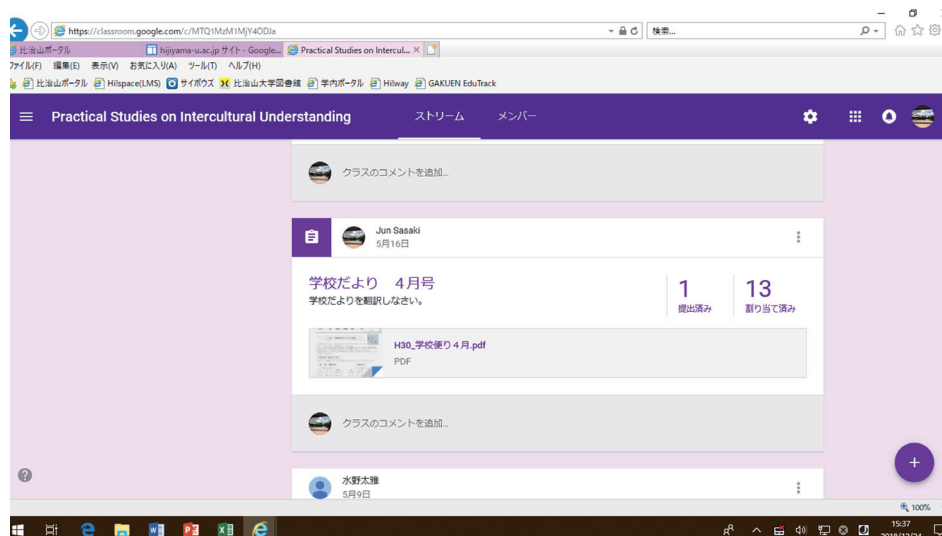


Figure 6

In the class, the students discussed other students' works. See the following figure in which there are some corrections made by the instructor and students:

appreciate

School news letter H30. June 31st
Hiroshima Municipal Hesaka elementary school
THE 3rd

Thank you for cheering in sports festival.
Just-ended sports festival. Students has a lot of practice since end of holiday. Thank you for cheering parents and community. Especially, Hesaka women club "Danmono" coaching for upper grades students since before the fact. Current day, all students exercise fruit, so well-transmitted there desperation. This year introduce entrance procession.

This year's sports day, introduce entrance mach. The march it seems was unfamiliar for children, but practice repeatedly in the production, grew up to be a wonderful much. Especially sixth graders during the practice we felt of being a leader of Hesaka elementally school, in the from of work of the staff, committee activities, practicing gymnastic exercises and can't breath and finally a accomplished them all. At the end of the sports day, thank you from the bottom of my heart that many parents *our* remain and will help to withdraw the tent and move the soccer goal. *put away*

I learned "life" through evacuation training.
We conduct evacuation drills three times a year in order to "safely and quickly evacuate when a fire or a disaster occurs" and "to cultivate the spirit of respect for our own lives through evacuation drills".
This time, I did the training for the first time this year. The children did not have a word of mouth, but they hunched in their mouths and evacuated from the classroom to the playground in accordance with the teacher's instructions.
After I lined up in the school yard, I heard a story about the greatness of protecting my life from the principal.
The next time I will go in the fall.
We will be able to conduct actions that are even faster and more accurate than this time.

Health checkup is carried out

Understand the health condition of children properly, in order to maintain and promote mental and physical health, Hesaka School is doing medical examinations. A medical checkup done by inviting a doctor include "Dentistry", "Otolaryngology", "Internal medicine" and "Ocular".
The examination is visual acuity, hearing ability, *and* urine. Although it is necessary to wait quietly for health examination, the children were in good posture, waiting for their turn.
We will distribute "Notification of inspection results" to each household promptly after hospital examination and examination from homeroom teacher.

Figure 7

After we discussed school newsletters, we sent them to Hesaka Elementary School. Those school newsletters are on the website of the school.

The students realized that they actively engaged in community service. This involvement leads to meaningful service. In 3.2.1, we have seen that students' participation in high-quality service-learning can lead to improved attendance, increased test scores and greater problem-solving skills. These appear in the student evaluations. For a question about the participation attitude to the course, 75.1 % of the students participated actively in the course. Some of the students' comments are as follows:

- (4) a. It was first time for me to translate school newsletters into English, but that deepened my learning.
- b. It was difficult for me, but I realized that I could gain knowledge that I was not supposed to gain in other courses.
- c. It was great to collaborate with other people.
- d. What is good about this course is that we, as a group, could solve problems.

Barkley, Major and Cross (2014: 17) suggests that students can learn through interacting with others and "students can pool and share knowledge such that they know more as a group than they do as individuals." The comments in (4) illustrate that collaborative learning works well in this course.

4. Conclusion

We have seen how education for intercultural understanding and collaborative learning enhanced students' attitudes towards learning. As shown above, the instructors employed two specific teaching strategies of collaborative learning: role-play and service-learning. These two techniques helped students

learn collaboratively both inside and outside the classroom. What is more interesting is that the earlier learners get accustomed to education for intercultural understanding, the more they intend to study abroad. In fact, a certain number of students participate in either short-term or long-term study abroad programs afterward. This is a result that the instructors did not expect. Through these courses, however, we also found some issues that we left untouched: how do students gain feedbacks from international students? How much did service-learning conducted in a course accord with the standards discussed in section 3? These are some of the issues that we will examine from now on.

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¹ Each class of FYS in the Department of Language and Culture has 15 to 17 students. From the viewpoint of class operational advantages, it is preferable to have instructors from both the International Communication Course and Japanese Language and Culture Course. In the fall semester of 2017, we combined classes of Kunai and Sasaki (henceforth, K and S).

² Youth language is here regarded as a sociolect spoken by young people.

³ Sasaki made some corrections on (2).

⁴ The English glosses are of the students.

⁵ Google Classroom is a web service developed by Google for schools. It aims to distribute and grade assignments online.